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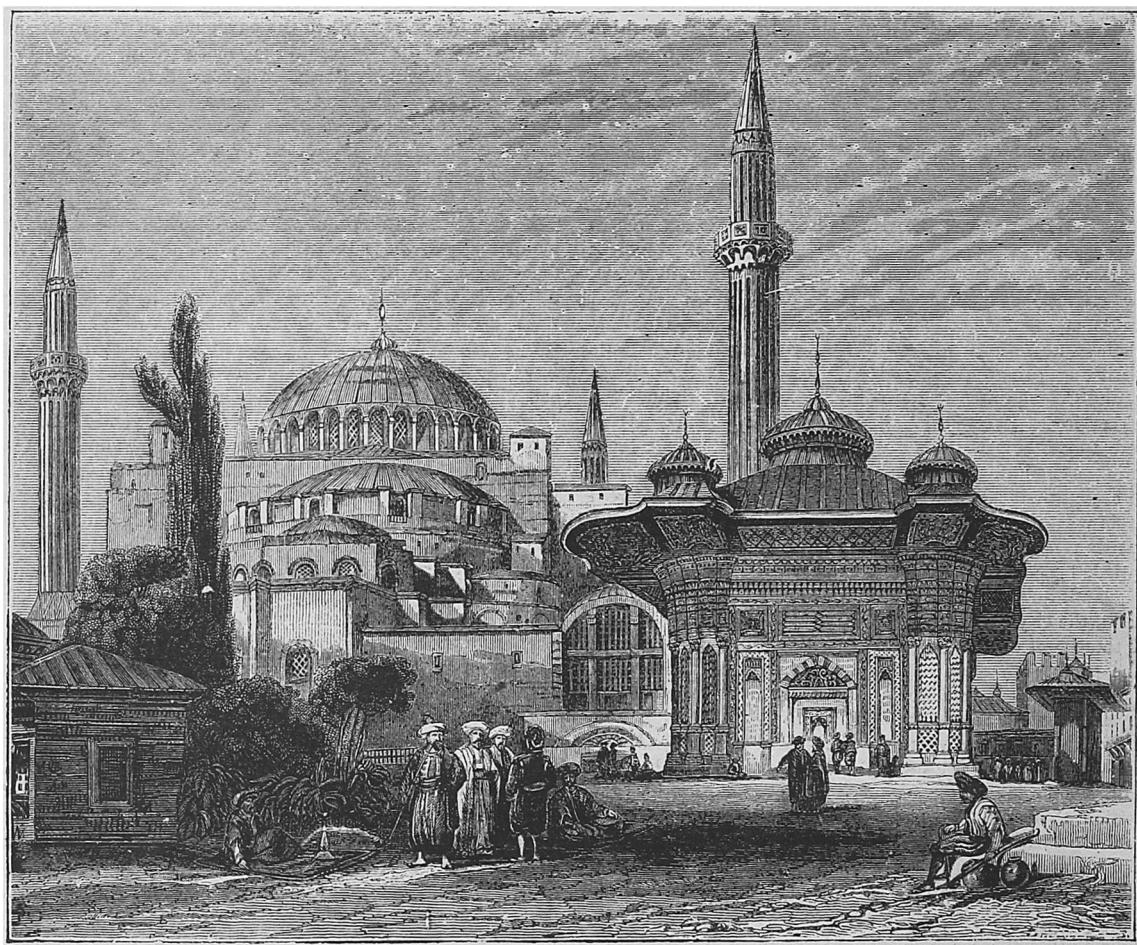
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THE MOSQUE OF SANTA SOPHIA.

ONE of the most celebrated buildings in the Turkish capital is the Mosque of St. Sophia. Everybody there goes to see it. Some are stricken with astonishment, and come away deeply impressed with the grandeur of the whole design, and the solemnity of the venerable place; some are disappointed—they have thought it greater and grander than it really is, have pictured to themselves a realisation of old Arabian stories, a building that seemed as if it had been erected at the spell of the wonderful lamp—and the reality being surpassed by the ideal, they come away to grumble, and to jest at white-washed walls and Moorish carpets. But whatever may be the result of the visit, the visit is sure to be made. St. Sophia's Mosque

again fell into neglect. There was more sedition, and another fire, and then came the terrible event of the circus, in which about thirty or forty thousand people perished.

The erection of a really splendid building—a building such as Constantine intended, Constantius contemplated, and Theodosius dreamt of—was reserved for the emperor Justinian, who determined, so say the chroniclers, to “erect the most magnificent monument that had been raised since the creation.” East and west, north and south, the emperor looked for help. Every country was to be put under tribute; every land was to send some decoration; the emperor would search the world for its treasures and have but one altar for the offer-



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is the lion of the place, and really well deserves its proud position.

The original structure was built by the Greeks, and is the largest and most magnificent church ever erected by them. After the emperor Constantine had seen the blazing cross in the air, had shaken off his paganism, and adopted the creed of Christians, and had found that by the cross he conquered, he determined to build at the capital, which had been christened with his name, a splendid structure in honour of the new faith. So he erected a basilica, and dedicated it to the wisdom of God. After this, one or two emperors added to the edifice; but it fell into bad repair, as it was not properly cared for. When the Arians, in a riot about Chrysostom, set it on fire, it was suffered to remain in ruins, and even after Theodosius had begun to see to its restoration, the work

ing. The church of St. Sophia was to rival Solomon's temple; the satraps of Asia and the governors of provinces were to make careful search for marble for columns, and sculptures of every kind which might prove useful in the new building. “Art,” says Mr. Christie, in his paper on Mosaic work—to which we are indebted for some of these particulars—“was then at a low ebb; they had lost the art of design; they were obliged to steal their brooms ready made; and soon the spoils of temples, baths, and porticoes, which ornamented the Asian and European continents, and even isles in the sea, poured into Byzantium.” Ephesus sent the spoils of her beautiful temple of Diana; Baalbec surrendered the glories of its Sun temple; heathen magnificence poured out its treasures before the Christian temple; and along with the trophies of ancient art came workmen from all parts of the world, ten or twelve

thousand men were engaged, and two Greek architects set to work to build the last great wonder of the world—more marvellous than an Egyptian labyrinth, durable as Pharaoh's pyramids, gigantic as the walls of Babylon—more sacred than the tomb of Mausolus or the Jupiter Olympus, and more astonishing than the brazen Apollo—the colossus of Rhodes. It was said, an angel had communicated to the emperor the exact size of the building, had given him an actual, tangible, mathematical ground-plan; so he devoted himself to the work with great earnestness, pressed on the labour with becoming expedition, had a gallery especially erected, from which he might behold the busy scene at his ease. But not content with this, he took an active part in the erection. Peter the Great worked bravely in our dockyards—a timber for a throne, an adze for a sceptre—and in this Justinian somewhat resembled him. His royal hands were busy with the rest; his body clothed in a linen tunic, with a napkin round his head.

When the foundation had been cleared, there was a high and solemn feast. Thousands and tens of thousands of people assembled. The patriarch invoked a solemn blessing on the work, and the emperor put the first mortar to the stone, and so the work began.

There was to be a splendid dome, the final achievement of all architectural glory. It was to surpass everything that ever had been seen, to be for ever the one unapproachable model of all excellence; the admiration of the world was to be aroused, perhaps envy—but impotent envy—that might hope in vain to equal or approach this high triumph of art. How carefully every brick was to be made! how watchful were the emperor's confidants to be that nothing was omitted in their manufacture which could in any possibility contribute to their durability and beauty! This was why Troiloes, Bazilius, and Coleoquintus started for Rhodes to superintend the brickmaking. Every brick bore this inscription:—"It is founded by God; God will give help." Between every layer of bricks sacred relics were placed; and at intervals the workmen ceased their labours, and prayer and praise were offered. All this went on for a long time; no expense was spared, enormous sums were spent, barbarians were spoiled, coffers were emptied, taxes vexatiously increased, salaries omitted to be paid, lands and houses sold, property seized, even the leaden pipes of the city fountains melted down. Money must be had, and there was a woful want of it. Tertullian, with respect to the prodigality of dress, says:—"A great estate is drawn out of a little pocket; a weak, slender neck can make shift to carry about whole woods and lordships; vast sums of money, borrowed of the banker, and noted in his account-book, to be repaid every month with interest, are weighed at the beam of a thin slender ear; so great is the strength of pride and ambition, that even the weak feeble body of one woman shall be able to carry the weight and substance of so many pounds taken up at usury." Something like this was the condition of the church of St. Sophia. The lamps that swung in the church, with their delicate golden chains, and the elaborate ornamentation of the six thousand candelabra of purest gold, all represented so much shameful pillage, so much fair land pledged, so many woods and palaces sold out and out. Every lavish expenditure was prodigally flung around the building, and £200,000 were paid before the walls were a yard high.

After sixteen years the Basilica was finished. It was a high day in Byzantium. After the fashion of the "good piece of flesh," 2,000 oxen, 10,000 sheep, 600 deer, 1,000 pigs, 10,000 hens, 10,000 chickens, with 30,000 measures of wheat, were distributed to the people. In great pomp the emperor rode on his car of state to the Hippodrome, and then marched to the temple. As he drew near, the doors were thrown back, and as the long magnificent vista met his gaze, the walls and roof covered with gold and mosaics, and so many lamps and candelabra that the place seemed one vast sea of fire, he cried out: "Glory to God, who has thought me worthy of this work! I have conquered thee, O Solomon!"

As a specimen of the magnificence of the place, it may be mentioned that the holy table, or communion table, was, by the emperor's order, made of something which they esteemed

more precious than gold. It was a mixture made of pearls and diamonds, of gold and silver, of tin and copper, all of which were melted together. Cedrenus says, the altar was made of gold and silver and every sort of precious stone, of wood, of metal—in fact, of everything that could be produced by sea or land, and every material that the universe could furnish. The ground on which it rested was laid with plates of gold, and the table itself was supported by four golden columns. Forty large columns—a mysterious number, says Von Hammer (hence "*The Forty Thieves*")—separated the nave on the south and north from the aisles. The pulpit was of precious marble covered with gold and jewels.

When the Turks—so goes the legend—took possession of Constantinople, and the old streets of Byzantium echoed to the cry, "God is God!" the Sultan Mahomet II. entered the church of Santa Sophia on horseback. The Christians were at worship, a priest was celebrating mass, surrounded by deacons and acolytes, when the pavements of the church rang to the hoofs of the horse, and the Turk with his broad scimitar dashed into the holy place. The Christians, panic-stricken, fled, and the priest escaped by a door in one of the galleries; as he disappeared, there was a noise like thunder, and the door was supernaturally closed by a stone wall. The Turks add, when the Christians retake Constantinople, this gate will re-open of itself, and the priest will appear to finish his mass.

The modern condition of the building, although remarkable in general effect for beauty, is marred and spoiled by latter-day inventions. The beautiful marble pavement is concealed under immense carpets; the mosaics which decorated the walls are pitilessly whitewashed once in two years; a beautiful figure on the cupola is taken away, and a verse from the Koran put in its stead—"God is the light of heaven and earth." While the inside of the church has undergone these alterations, the exterior has been strengthened with enormous buttresses and piers. A crescent surmounts the cupola. In the mosque is the superb tomb of the emperor Constantine, for which the Turks have the highest veneration. The dome of the mosque is 113 feet in diameter, and is built in arches sustained by pillars of marble.

The mosques are the principal curiosities of Constantinople, and that of St. Sophia is the principal mosque. Franks are permitted to enter its stately walls on obtaining an order or licence for so doing—not otherwise. The traveller applies to his ambassador, the ambassador delivers the name of the applicant to the diplomatic agent, and a firman is granted, the required sum, varying from three to twelve pounds, has to be paid—this, of course, will be considered sufficient for a party of thirty or five-and-thirty persons—and in company with the deputed official you start for the mosques and the other sights of the city. The mosque of St. Sophia is in the form of a Greek cross. It is about the same length and breadth as St. Paul's Cathedral. The present dome did not form part of the original structure, that having been thrown down one-and-twenty years after its erection. Besides the chief dome there are two others of considerable dimensions, and six smaller ones. The principal dome is of an elliptical form, "much too flat to be externally beautiful, its height not exceeding one-sixth part of the diameter. Twenty-four windows are arranged around it, and it rests upon four strong arches." Four minarets, but each of a different shape, have been added by the Mahomedans. The building has been outwardly so patched and propped up in different ages that it has lost whatever beauty it may have originally possessed, and is now a heavy, unwieldy, and confused-looking mass. It is entered on the west side by a double vestibule about thirty-eight feet in breadth, which communicates with the interior by nine broad doors ornamented with bas-reliefs. The interior is spacious and imposing, not being broken by aisles or choirs—the building is said to contain 170 columns of marble, granite, *verd antique*, etc."

The mosque of the Sultan Achmet, and that of Solyman the Magnificent, are preferred by many travellers to the mosque of St. Sophia. Many of the mosques, like the latter, have formerly been Greek churches. Their incomes are very large.